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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to survey teacher training programs for teachers of the deaf, to ascertain the extent to which American Sign Language (ASL) and Manually Coded English (MCE) are taught in such programs, and to solicit the opinions of university personnel on the role of ASL and MCE in the language development of deaf children. The results from this survey were largely consistent with current practice in programs for deaf children. Most programs advocated the use of signing, both of MCE and ASL, as evidenced by textbooks used and faculty support for discussing the role of these signing systems in the language development of deaf children. Implications for teacher training programs are discussed in terms of pre-service teachers' knowledge of sign language/system(s), and how this information applies to the language development of deaf children. (Author)

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Program Evaluation Series No. 22

A SURVEY OF SIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION
IN TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS
IN EDUCATION OF THE HEARING IMPAIRED

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to survey teacher training programs for teachers of the deaf, to ascertain the extent to which American Sign Language (ASL) and Manually Coded English (MCE) are taught in such programs, and to solicit the opinions of university personnel on the role of ASL and MCE in the language development of deaf children.

The results from this survey were largely consistent with current practice in programs for deaf children. Most programs advocated the use of signing, both of MCE and ASL, as evidenced by textbooks used and faculty support for discussing the role of these signing systems in the language development of deaf children.

Implications for teacher training programs are discussed in terms of pre-service teachers' knowledge of sign language/system(s), and how this information applies to the language development of the deaf children.

A SURVEY OF SIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

IN TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

IN EDUCATION OF THE HEARING IMPAIRED

Teacher training programs are responsible for training teachers to meet the educational needs of deaf students. Among the needs that have been identified, by teachers (Stewart, 1983a; Grissom and Cochran, 1986), deaf adults (Stewart, 1983b), and administrators (Nash, 1986), is sign language proficiency, and in the case of Stewart's work, American Sign Langauge (ASL) proficiency. Maxwell (1985) reported on the status of sign language instruction at institutions preparing teachers to work with deaf children. She concluded that a great deal of confusion existed at the university level about sign communication.

The purpose of our study was to follow-up on Maxwell's study, to ascertain the extent to which ASL and Manually Coded English (MCE) are taught in training programs for teachers of the deaf, and to solicit the opinions of university personnel on the role of ASL and MCE in the language development of deaf children. Prior to reporting the results of our survey, we examine current teachers' opinions of the role of signs in the education of the deaf, language preference of deaf people, and sign language instruction at the college level.

Signing in the classroom: ASL or MCE?

Arguments made in support of using ASL in the classroom are based on the fact that deaf children of deaf parents tend to have higher academic achievement than deaf children of hearing parents,

and ASL is the primary language of the deaf community. Additionally, deaf adults report that being able to communicate is of utmost importance to them, and that deaf children are entitled to accessible communication. With respect to language development, studies have shown that a signed language will develop naturally as a result of deaf individuals having been exposed to sign of any kind. This supports the notion that at least some deaf children do not acquire MCE in the same form in which they are exposed to it, but acquire an intermediary system that shares characteristics found in ASL (Livingston, 1983; Newport, 1986; Supalla, 1986).

Yet, (typically hearing) people working with hearing impaired children have equally valid experiences based on day-to-day contact that need to be considered in the same way the viewpoints of deaf individuals who have been through the system are considered. Grissom and Cochran (1986), who found that ASL was a low priority among teachers of the deaf, stated that

> Institutions preparing future teachers of hearing-impaired students may profit from sensitivity to the concerns of teachers and administrators who are directly involved in working with people who are hearing impaired (p. 270).

Nevertheless, teacher training programs that are sensitive to the needs of teachers, administrators, and deaf children are also constrained by state certification requirements and to a lesser extent, Council on Education of the Deaf requirements. Neither certification board specifically requires ASL proficiency. And although most states have some set of competency based requirements

for inservice teachers (Sandefur, 1984), these tests do not evaluate sign language proficiency.

Surveys of teachers reveal that proficient signing is an important component of skills needed in total communication classes. However, there is disagreement about whether ASL or MCE or both should be used. For example, Stewart (1983a) found that most teachers believed that deaf children should begin signing at as early an age as possible, should eventually become bilingual in signing ASL and MCE, and that teachers themselves should be similarly bilingual. On the basis of this survey, Stewart concluded that bilingual education should be implemented in total communication programs.

Nash (1986) found that sign language proficiency was a critical factor in hiring teachers of the deaf. Eighty-three percent of the respondents to a nationwide survey of hearing impaired program administrators rated sign language proficiency as important. Similarly, 72% of these administrators rated graduation from a program with a total communication philosophy as important, as opposed to 38% for programs with an auditory-oral philosophy. Unfortunately, Nash's article did not differentiate between ASL and MCE.

Grissom and Cochran (1986) found that skills related to total communication, defined as the "simultaneous use of signing, finger-spelling, speech, and auditory potential" (p. 269) were the most important competencies that teachers of the deaf should have. Extensive knowledge of ASL and how it differs from other

systems was not of high priority. Although the article did not explicitly state that total communication involved the use of MCE, it was implied that MCE was the preferred system of the teachers surveyed.

Crittenden (1986) conducted a national survey of hearing (N=177) and hearing impaired (N=45) educators of deaf children on their attitudes toward MCE and ASL signing. One question addressed the communication skills teachers had at the beginning of their careers. Results showed that the hearing respondents more frequently reported below average signing skills for themselves and had significantly more difficulty in communicating with their students than did the hearing impaired respondents. However, at the time of the survey, a similar level of understanding of their students existed for those respondents rating themselves as better-than-average or fluent signers. Interestingly, the hearing impaired educators (6.4%) were more likely than the hearing educators (2.3%) to report difficulty understanding their students. With respect to signing in the classroom, the hearing educators preferred MCE whereas the hearing impaired educators were split evenly between ASL and MCE. A similar split was found when the group was asked whether sign skills should be made a part of teacher competency requirements for certification. That is, for the hearing educators 39.8% reported that ASL should be tested, whereas 37.6% of the hearing impaired educators reported the same. And 47.6% of the hearing educators and 51.2% of the hearing impaired educators reported that MCE should be required for teacher certification.

Obviously, teacher training programs need to be modified to increase pre-service and beginning teachers' communicative competence, particularly with respect to integrating signing into their instructional programming and delivery. Indeed, Crittenden (1986) concluded that there may be a

> serious problem in the preparation of educators of the deaf. It seems that professionals are not being trained to understand the languages of the children with whom they work... Education is predicated upon communication. Learning cannot occur unless there is understanding,. and the results of this survey indicate that educators of the deaf are less than effective in promoting communication between the teacher and the learner....their [the educators'] proficiency in sign has not kept pace with their acceptance (p. 278-279).

Overall, studies indicate that considerable disagreement exists among practicing professionals who have the closest and most frequent contact with hearing impaired students. There is also evidence that differences exist between hearing and hearing impaired professionals, as well. It is instructive to note that many of the hearing impaired professionals themselves might once have been part of the clientele served by these practices.

Language preference of deaf people

In a survey of deaf adults (N=162) who had been through the educational system, Stewart (1983b) found that many deaf adults (45.7%) felt that deaf children should acquire ASL and English signs simultaneously; whereas 33.3% preferred ASL only in the initial stages of sign acquisition. In addition, deaf adults believed that teachers should be efficient communicators in both ASL and English signs, with a majority (90.1%) favoring that all

teachers should be required to learn ASL. Finally, it is noteworthy that in this study, deaf adults strongly supported the inclusion of deaf people in the formation of educational policy for deaf children. The following two quotations are particularly telling in this regard.

> Hearing people usually cannot communicate well enough to get first hand information about deafness.
>
> If a student has the right to use whatever sign system is most comfortable, he also has the right to be understood while he explains himself in ASL (Stewart, 1983b, p. 881-882).

Sign Language Instruction at the College Level

Delgado (1984) surveyed sign language instruction in 790 junior and community colleges. Of this number, 373 (47%) offered sign language classes, and together have an enrollment of over 30,000 students per year. Several of these colleges also offered interpreter training. The majority of the sign language instructors were deaf. Because these are two-year colleges, they do not have teacher-training programs per se, although many do have liberal arts programs from which students can transfer into four- year colleges and universities to continue training in education.

In contrast to sign instruction at the junior college level, it is rare to find a deaf person on the faculty of a four-year college or university. Access to employment at such institutions is typically gained through possession of a doctorate degree and extensive training and experience in the field. While being hearing impaired does not *ipso facto* make an individual a good sign language teacher, it is also rare to find a hearing person who is a fluent

signer, bilingual in ASL and English, and able to teach a sign language course effectively. Maxwell (1985) for example, found that many faculty members of teacher training programs were unclear about the kind of signing they were teaching, the difference between ASL and English, and the linguistic status of ASL.

In the present study, we looked at the type of sign language/system(s) being offered, as well as university faculty opinions on the role of various sign language/system in the language development of deaf children.

Method

All (83) teacher preparation programs listed in the 1986 reference issue of the American Annals of the Deaf were mailed a questionnaire. An eight week time limit was set and 60 (73.0%) responses were received. No attempt was made to follow-up on those who did not respond. The respondents were evenly dispersed geographically.

The questionnaire consisted of 17 multiple-choice and open-ended questions that surveyed a number of issues related to sign language instruction and the emphasis given to the role of ASL or MCE in the language development of deaf children.

Results

Demographic information. Most of the programs employed four or fewer hearing faculty (78%) and no deaf faculty (58%). These programs trained from five to over 100 hearing students (median = 20 students); 23% had no deaf students, and an additional 29% had only one deaf student. Three programs had nine deaf students

apiece. Fifteen percent of the programs were exclusively oral in their philosophical orientation, 84% were total communication or indicated no philosophical preference.

Sign language requirements. Fifty-six (93%) of the responding programs required some level of signing skills. Most of the programs or their affiliated universities, offered one to three courses (82%), and a few offered as many as nine courses. Specifically, 25% required one course, 38% required two courses, and an additional 25% required three courses. The number of courses required suggest that basic signing skills are deemed important to pre-service teachers.

It is interesting to note that 55% of the programs offered or required both ASL and MCE, 10% offered ASL exclusively and 25% offered one or more MCE systems exclusively. The remaining 10% did not specify which language or sign system they taught. In 90% of the cases, credit (either required or elective) is granted for coursework.

Not surprisingly, but perhaps unfortunately, 63% of the responding programs are in states that do not require sign skills for state certification. Sign skills are required for graduation in only 32% of the responding programs. In 18% of these programs, some sort of proficiency examination may be passed in lieu of coursework.

Sign language instruction. Because MCE systems are widely used in schools and programs for deaf children, we were particularly interested in which MCE systems are currently being taught to

teachers at the pre-service level. The three most popular MCE systems were Signed English (43%), Signing Exact English (SEE II) (23%), and Manual English (20%). MCE was not taught in 13% of the programs.

In order to discover university faculty's perceptions of the relative importance of the various signing systems currently being used in programs for deaf children, we asked respondents to rank order seven of the most commonly cited manual communication systems (including ASL). From Table 1, it is seen that faculty ranked ASL as the most important language/sign system for pre-service teachers to learn, followed very closely by Signed English and SEE II, respectively. This is consistent with the reported practice of 65% of the programs teaching ASL, either exclusively or in addition to MCE.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Sixty-four percent of the respondents indicated a textbook that they used to teach signing. In all, ten published books were reported. The textbook most often used for instruction (32%) was A Basic Course in American Sign Language (Humphries, Padden, & O'Rourke, 1980). That is, with respect to textbooks, ASL is clearly part of the curriculum in many of the sign courses. Programs that taught MCE as well as those that taught ASL were found to use this book. Conversely, we also found that ASL-teaching

programs also used other books that are not geared toward teaching ASL as a language.

The second most commonly used book was The Joy of Signing (Riekehof, 1978), which is a vocabulary book rather than a language book and therefore does not teach any particular system. The third ranked book was Signing Exact English (Gustason, Pfetzing, & Zawalkow, 1982) although Signed English was the most popular MCE system being taught. Interestingly, no program reported using either The Signed English Dictionary (Bornstein, Hamilton, Saulnier, & Roy, 1975) or The Signed English Starter (Bornstein & Saulnier, 1984). Signing Exact English presumes that the adult learner is already a fluent English speaker, and therefore undertakes the task of teaching signed codes for the vocabulary and bound morphology of English. This suggests that, with respect to MCE, the system that teacher educators believe is most important, and what they are actually teaching, are different.

Less frequently used books included Ameslan (Fant, 1972), Conversational Sign Language II (Madsen, 1972), Intermediate Sign Language (Fant, 1980), A Basic Course in Manual Communication (NAD, 1973), Signs of the Times (Shroyer, 1982), Intermediate Conversational Sign Language (Madsen, 1982), American Sign Language (Cokely & Baker, 1980), and Preferred Signs (Texas Education Agency, 1978), as well as other unpublished class materials.

Knowledge about sign languages/systems for teaching language to deaf children. Every teacher training program has at least one course that deals with language development in deaf children,

with some component addressing methods and materials for enhancing language skills. It is reasonable to expect that classroom practice will reflect the kind of pre-service training that the teachers received. In a survey of deaf classrooms, King (1983) found that a common practice in classrooms was to have some form of sentence structure guide posted (e.g. Fitzgerald Key, Kernel Sentence patterns, APPLE TREE patterns) for students to use in constructing grammatical sentences, understanding sentences, and correcting their own constructions. Copious labeling of pictures and objects is another common practice. Thus it seems reasonable to assume that teachers were taught that these practices are valuable.

Literacy (however it is taught) is also a valued part of language development. This assumption was borne out in our survey: 80% of the respondents stated that they included information about reading and writing in their language development course(s).

The term "language development" was not defined in order to allow the respondent to interpret it in as broad or narrow a sense as s/he deemed fit. While we realize that this practice may make the data difficult to interpret, it also allows us to see what university personnel define as "language development" for deaf children. Nearly 82% of the respondents included information about speaking and listening, suggesting that knowledge about English language development through the auditory channel is important. However, only 60% included information about MCE and only 53% did so for ASL, suggesting that they believe information about English development through the signed modality to be less

important, and that information on deaf children's acquisition of ASL even less important. An alternative explanation is that information about MCE and ASL development is not as readily available as for the traditional modalities for language (which is typically thought of as English) -- reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Finally, faculty in each program were asked if they would incorporate information on the role of ASL in the language development of deaf children if such information were readily available. Forty-two percent of the respondents would include additional language related information on ASL and MCE, and an additional 7% would add information on ASL only. None would include additional information on MCE only, suggesting that MCE information might be more readily available or accessible than ASL and therefore is already incorporated to some extent. However, 32% of the respondents claimed they would not include any additional information on signing, and 19% did not answer the question.

Discussion

The results from this survey were largely consistent with those reported in Maxwell (1985), Nash (1986), Crittenden (1986), and Grissom and Cochran (1986). We found that most teacher education programs advocate the use of signing as indicated by sign language requirements and course credit. It is encouraging to note that many programs were teaching both MCE and ASL and still others were teaching ASL exclusively.

Our results indicated a general conflict between philosophy and methodology of sign language instruction. Particularly telling

in this regard is the fact that ASL was rated as being the most important signed language/system that teachers need to know, yet non-ASL textbooks were being used to teach ASL.

ASL, Signed English, and SEE II, in that order, were deemed to be the three most important sign language/systems for preservice teachers to learn, and indeed, this perception was matched in practice. The most often taught sign language/systems were ASL, Signed English, and SEE II, again, in that order. There is still some doubt, however, as to the competence attained by most preservice teachers, given the small number of courses devoted to sign language instruction in deaf education programs.

While university personnel might be aware of the most recent information on the relative effectiveness of various systems, including ASL, neither certifying boards such as the Council on Education of the Deaf and state educational boards mandate proficiency in sign language. This implies that a shift in thinking is occurring, but the shift has not yet affected such certifying agencies. That universities are bound to follow these guidelines makes it appear that the cart is now before the horse.

On the bright side, our findings are in accordance with the perceived importance of sign proficiency for hiring teachers (Nash, 1986) and for retaining them in total communication programs (Grissom & Cochran (1986). Nash (1986) did not specify what she meant by "proficiency", nor did she differentiate between ASL and MCE, making it difficult to ascertain whether first year teachers have the requisite skills to be considered "proficient" enough to

be hired upon graduation. Given that most of the programs we surveyed only required about one year's worth of coursework, it is difficult to believe that that amount of coursework alone is adequate for the first year teacher. Crittenden's (1986) findings that hearing teachers in general reported more communication difficulty than did deaf teachers supports this speculation.

Most programs advocated both MCE and ASL, as evidenced by textbooks used, and faculty belief about what pre- service teachers should know. However, we found that it was not clear how much preservice teachers know about the sign language/system(s) they are learning, nor how this information can be applied to the language development of the children with whom they will be working.

Finally, teacher's beliefs are shaped by what they are taught in their university training programs as well as by their own on-the-job experiences. The faculty of university training programs indicate a mixed preference for ASL and English, with a general acknowledgement of the need for ASL. This articulates nicely with the perceived need in the field for ASL skills (Stewart, 1983a; 1983b).

Implications

The following implications for teacher training programs can be drawn from the data and literature.

1. University faculty need to have additional training in the instruction of sign language, both in MCE and in ASL. Although still in its infancy, a system such as certification from the Sign Instructors Guidance Network (SIGN) should be implemented to

assure that appropriate teaching methods and materials are used. We recognize that this notion flies in the face of traditional academic freedom in a university setting. However, it is not unusual for certain other credentials to be required for joining a university faculty to teach other subject areas (e.g., Ph.D. and Certificate of Clinical Competence for Speech Pathology/Audiology).

2. Deaf adults need to be trained and employed by teacher training programs to provide instruction in sign language and practice in conversation at an adult level. Too often we meet teachers who can communicate adequately with their second graders, but not at a level that challenges their students. They are at the students' level, not even a step ahead of the children. Transfer of these teachers to a higher grade results in time wasted while the children give sign language instruction to the teacher.

3. Greater knowledge on the part of university faculty about sign language and systems will result in better courses in language development and instruction, since knowledge about sign and the relationships among the deaf child's internal representations of language and output in sign, speech and writing. Perhaps more efficient strategies for teaching English may be developed, including those based on bilingual education practices from other spoken languages.

4. Teacher educators (particularly in total communication training programs) should use sign language in their teaching. That is, they should model the behaviors that they hope to instill in their

students. This practice leads to sign vocabulary development and enables future teachers to observe and learn techniques for presenting language visually. Signing without voice also enables practice in reception outside of the normal sign language classes, an area teachers traditionally lament to be weak.

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Table 1. Frequency of rank ordering for each sign system/language

Sign System/Language	Rank order		
	1	2	3
ASL	27	33	18
Signed English	25	18	23
SEE II	20	18	8
Manual English	12	8	7
SEE I	5	2	3
Pidgin Sign	3	4	3
LOVE	0	0	3